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Abigail or Asherah: Competing Canonical Readings of Malachi 2:10-16

JOHN JACKSON

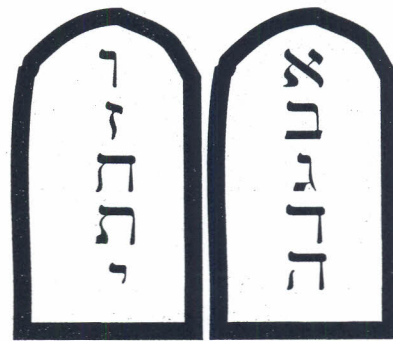
To read the Bible as canon is to read any part in relationship to the whole. No one story or psalm or prophetic speech is isolated, but all are related to the story and message of the whole. The way the story is structured is part of the message that is related.

For example, the traditional Hebrew canon of the Jewish Tanak, reflected in the medieval Masoretic Text, contains the same writings as the Old Testament found in Protestant churches. But the order of writings differs significantly. The Masoretic Text ends with the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, while the Christian Old Testament ends with Malachi. The Jewish canon ends with Israel in exile, separated from their land and living with the memory of a capital city and a temple that were destroyed because of the unfaithfulness of the community. But the 70 years of exile predicted by Jeremiah are about to end, and return is imminent under the Persian king Cyrus. 2 Chronicles ends with an imperative, “Let them go up!” This ending to the book ignores the return from Babylon described by Haggai and Ezra and looks afresh to a time—any time—of return. It speaks to people of later generations, again under foreign domination and still separated in some ways from the land, who looked forward to a return.

The Christian Old Testament ends with the words of the prophet Malachi, a structure to the book inherited basically from the translators of the Greek translation of the scriptures, the Septuagint. Written after the return from Babylonian exile, Malachi describes the continuing unfaithfulness of the people of God. This ending also looks to the future, but a different kind of future. The book concludes with warnings about impending judgment and the announcement of the coming of the prophet Elijah. The prophet would be the agent of change. He would be the means God would use to transform the hearts of the people. The same writings, but two different endings that affect the way one reads the whole book.

One can read smaller units of the Bible as individual “books,” as well. The Torah or the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, is one of the most identifiable units of the entire Bible. When read as a book, the story is essentially about promise and its fulfillment. God’s promises to all creation and to Abraham in particular provide the thread that binds these books together. While narrating a series of threats to these promises, the story moves to their fulfillment, the promises of family, blessing, and land. The story ends with Israel on the verge of entering that land and receiving the fulfillment of God’s promise. But still on the outside. The promise is still unrealized, unfulfilled. It awaits another day.

Such a story symbolized much of Israel’s history and would have spoken powerfully to the people of God in many generations as they suffered through apostate rulers, foreign domination, and exile. Much like ending the canon with 2 Chronicles, ending the



book of Torah outside the land stressed hope and anticipation. For those whose ancestors had been in the land but failed to keep the covenant of God, the story still spoke with the possibility of a new beginning, a new fulfillment of the covenant promises.

Gerhard von Rad and others proposed that we should not speak of a “Pentateuch” but of a “Hexateuch,” in part precisely because the promises of Genesis remain unfulfilled at the end of Deuteronomy 34. He argued that Genesis to Joshua was a more logical unit. Once in the land, once possession of the land was

assured, only then was the story complete. Yet that is a different story, different because the proposed “canon” is different. Reading Genesis to Joshua tells one story. Reading Genesis to Deuteronomy tells a different one.

Many efforts have been made the past 10 or 15 years to read the book of Psalms less as a loose collection of liturgical poems and more as a book.

What is the canonical effect of reading the Book of the Twelve with Hosea as the opening chapter and Malachi as its conclusion?

Whereas these efforts are really quite ancient, such canonical readings have gained momentum recently. Proposals have been made about the function of Psalms 1 and 2 as introductions to the entire Psalter; about the place of Psalms 1, 19, 119 as structural markers in the Psalter; and about the general movement of the Psalter from lament to praise.¹

All such readings of the Old Testament—or parts of it—reflect what I would like to call the “canonical effect.” The canonical effect is the result of reading portions of scripture in relation to other portions of scripture with which they may have had no original connection. Individual psalms were composed in very different settings with differing expressions of faith concerning God and human beings. But when those psalms were collected and read together, the cumulative effect of that reading produces an understanding of God and humanity that no single psalm could encapsulate. The meaning of a psalm by itself differs from what it means in relation to the rest of the psalms.

Recently, there have been a number of efforts to read the books of the minor prophets canonically, to ask what the books as a single book, the “Book of the Twelve” (as it is described in the Jewish canon) say that goes beyond the message of each individual prophet. So, one might ask, What is the significance that Hosea is first and Malachi is last? What is the canonical effect of reading the Book of the Twelve with Hosea as the opening chapter and Malachi as its conclusion?

This became an issue for me a few years ago when I was working with a divinity school student who was trying to choose an Old Testament passage on which to practice her developing exegetical skills. She was interested in something having to do with marriage, so we talked about the major texts available to her. We landed in Malachi 2, and I offered her some suggestions about resources to use and key points in the text to which she might want to pay special attention. As we talked, I began to hear echoes of Hosea 1-3 in the back of my mind. As she developed her paper over the ensuing months, one question I encouraged her to explore was whether the prophet was addressing a literal situation in post-exilic Israel—intermarriage and divorce—or whether the prophet was speaking metaphorically as Hosea had.

I return to those echoing voices now for myself. Had this prophet deliberately picked up the language of Hosea and Jeremiah generations later to again describe Israel’s relationship with Yahweh in terms of marriage?² Or was he employing language that was thought appropriate to deal with issues of divorce and intermarriage by members of the covenant community? Was the prophet employing marital language literally or metaphorically? And if he was using this language literally, why had I so easily been led to think of Hosea and Jeremiah?

Modern interpreters are divided on what to do with Mal 2:10-16. The traditional and most common reading views the oracle literally and historically as a condemnation of intermarriage and (probably) divorce

in post-exilic Judah. Others have interpreted the words of the prophet metaphorically. They argue that the oracle condemns idolatry in second temple Judah, just as Hosea had done in north Israel nearly two centuries before. The metaphorical approaches to this passage differ, but usually stated Yahweh is the scorned wife, and Judah as a religious community has entered into relations with a foreign goddess.

In the past, there has been a certain attractiveness of the literal approach to this text. Interpreters searching for instruction in the Bible about marriage have often turned to Mal 2:10-16 to find a word from God about the sanctity of marriage and the horror of divorce. The Old Testament makes few statements addressing marriage, let alone divorce and remarriage, so the words of the prophet Malachi *as usually translated* are all the more striking: "The LORD was a witness between you and your covenant wife, to whom you have been faithless ... 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD ..." (Mal 2:14, 16). Though divorce may have been allowed by Moses (Deut 24:1), it is often argued, these prophetic words are understood to state God's perfect will on the subject. "I hate divorce."

The text itself is problematic in a number of places,³ but there has been a general consensus about the key themes of the paragraph. Most interpreters have understood this oracle to address two related problems in post-exilic Judah (verse 13, "And this you do as well"). Israelite men had been divorcing their Israelite wives (verses 10, 13-16) so that they could marry "foreign women," women in the land who were devotees of other deities (verses 11-12).⁴ There are variations on this interpretation. Redditt argues that the oracle originally addressed only the priests because (1) it follows on Mal 1:2-2:9, oracles concerning priests, and (2) only priests would have had access to the altar (vv. 13, 16).⁵ Hill proposes that Israelite men would have been motivated by socioeconomic concerns to abandon their Israelite wives and try to move up the social ladder by marrying well-placed local women.⁶ Others have argued that the text speaks to two examples of unfaithfulness that are not necessarily related to one another.⁷

Interpreters often offer this kind of "historical" interpretation of Mal 2:10-16 in the context of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, who clearly dealt with issues of intermarriage. Van der Woude relates the words of Malachi to Ezra 9:2: "Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands ..." He does not believe that divorce is an issue in Malachi 2 but that verse 16 refers to neglecting one's Jewish wife in favor of a second, non-Jewish wife. He argues that the words of the prophet help "pave the way for Ezra's struggle for a pure community."⁸ Drinkard also sees the work of Malachi as a preparatory phase to Ezra's reforms.⁹ Hugenberger has enumerated many of the most persuasive parallels between Malachi and Ezra-Nehemiah.¹⁰

One problem with the literal interpretation of Mal 2:10-16 is that if the prophet addresses two interrelated issues (divorce from Israelite wives in order to marry foreign women), why does the prophet place the discussion of divorce second? Though he does not entirely answer this concern, Ernst Wendland has offered a convincing analysis of these verses (in spite of their many difficulties), an outline that has been modified by Hugenberger and to which I have added a few lines:¹¹

A God (Elohim) is one (*'ehād*) who created (*bārā'*) his people to be one (*'ehād*). General sin: unfaithfulness (*bāgad*) (v. 10)

B Specific sin: unfaithfulness (*bāgad*) by intermarriage; they have profaned the "holiness" of Yahweh (v. 11)

C Verdict: Exclusion by Yahweh, rejection of food offering (*minchā*) (v. 11)

C¹ Verdict: Rejection of food offering (*minchā*) by Yahweh (v. 12)

B¹ Specific sin: Infidelity (*bāgad*) by divorce; Yahweh was a witness to the covenant into which you entered (v. 14)

A¹ God (Elohim) is the one (*'ehād*) who made (*'āsā*) husband and wife to be one (*'ehād*). General sin: unfaithfulness (*bāgad*) (v. 15)

Summary: Exhortation not to be unfaithful (*bāgad*) spoken by Yahweh, the God (Elohim) of Israel, Yahweh of hosts (v. 16)

This structure suggests that the passage, though possibly corrupt in places, does form a coherent unit. The two issues address both dimensions of the actions being taken by some men in Judah early in the Persian period. They are entering into marriages with non-Israelite women, and in so doing are, it is inferred, participating in the non-Yahwistic cults of their wives. Even if there are economic motivations for their actions, the prophet only addresses the religious implications of their acts. At the same time, their Israelite wives—sisters in the covenant—are being neglected or, more likely, are being divorced to pave the way for these new relationships. It is possible that the violation of covenant partners is left to the last to emphasize the especially egregious nature of this offense.

But other voices have increasingly called for a metaphorical reading of Mal 2:10-16. Since at least the work of C. C. Torrey,¹² interpreters have argued that the prophet's words do not address a breakdown of the family in Judah but a renewal of idolatry. O'Brien questions those who read Isa 50:1-3 and 54:1-10; Hos 1-3; and Jer 2-3 as metaphor while historicizing similar language in Malachi.¹³ She contends that Mal 2:10-16 (and the book as a whole) consciously employs not only the earlier prophetic language of covenant infidelity but also legal traditions from the Pentateuch to bolster the prophet's condemnation of Judah.¹⁴ Petersen suggests that Asherah worship in particular is the offense, and in verse 11 reads "he loves Asherah," emending the text to restore a consonant he proposes was lost by haplography.¹⁵

A number of significant reasons have been advanced in favor of a metaphorical reading of Mal 2:10-16. The most cogent is the similarity between the language here and the earlier language of Hosea and Jeremiah and the fact that prophets elsewhere do not express concerns relating to marriage. The order of the two indictments, intermarriage then divorce, is often noted as a problem with the historical reading. Others suggest that 2:16, as usually translated ("I hate divorce"), contradicts Deuteronomy 24. The text itself follows pericopes with strong ritual concerns, and the passage itself speaks of altars and sacrifices, so a concern with improper worship (e.g., idolatry) would be a good fit.¹⁶ Some have pointed to a supposed lack of moral teaching elsewhere in Malachi.¹⁷

Isaksson emphasizes the difficulties with the language of divorce in 2:16, and argues the entire text should not be interpreted on the basis of two disputed words. He contends that there is no evidence that the text itself was interpreted in the earliest periods as a condemnation of divorce.¹⁸ Isaksson also rejects a

But it is equally possible and, I think, even more likely, that it is the canonical position of Malachi that leads one to such a reading of this oracle.

literal interpretation of the pericope because marriage was not understood as *b'rit*, covenant, during this period,¹⁹ though Hugenberg offers this as the very thesis of his work and presents a convincing case.²⁰ Many reject a metaphorical interpretation here because it places Yahweh in the position of the forsaken wife rather than the offended husband as in

Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. Petersen suggests the reason for this gender transposition is that Asherah worship ("the daughter of a foreign god") is the central issue in the prophet's day.²¹

Despite the persuasive arguments that have been advanced for a metaphorical reading of Mal 2:10-16, such a reading is not without its own problems. In the context of fifth-century Judah, the literal interpretation seems to be the most convincing. The "unfaithfulness" that the text condemns is never spoken of as an offense against God but against "one another" (verse 10) or against "the wife of your youth" (verses 14, 15). The communal focus of the language of the passage speaks most meaningfully to offenses against other members of the community, though these acts of faithlessness certainly do constitute unfaithfulness toward God, as well. This may explain the absolute statements about unfaithfulness, verse 11 and 16. In addition, the text lacks any direct indications that the prophet intended the language used here to be understood metaphorically (unlike Jer 3:20). The best case one could make is to say that the previous use of this language

would lead to an assumption that the language here is metaphorical. Further, the issue of intermarriage and its attendant ramifications was certainly present in post-exilic Israel.

The fact that the metaphor would make the unusual move of making Yahweh the wife has some merit. The closest parallel to such language in the Old Testament is the hypostatized image of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1 through 9 who calls the Israelites to abandon other paramours and love her alone. But there, the text stops short of identifying God with the figure of wisdom. In addition, the language of the text becomes muddled if God is both witness and plaintiff to the same offenses (as it would be in Mal. 2:14).²²

The prophet addresses issues of marriage and intermarriage in Judah in the Persian period, not unlike the situations addressed later in the fifth century by Nehemiah and Ezra. Yet, many interpreters have attempted to read the passage metaphorically. Why? It is the result of what I would call the “canonical effect.” These interpreters have read other parts of scripture, and in the language of Malachi, they hear echoes of other voices, particularly those of Jeremiah and Hosea. It is certainly possible that Malachi could have drawn upon Hosea’s metaphorical language of marriage and unfaithfulness to again condemn the covenant failure of God’s people in metaphorical terms.

But it is equally possible and, I think, even more likely, that it is the canonical position of Malachi that leads one to such a reading of this oracle. In the fifth century, the prophet addressed the issue of intermarriage and divorce by members of the reconstituted covenant community. When the Book of the Twelve (Hosea-Malachi) was later edited, Malachi’s oracles formed a bookend with those of Hosea. The similar language they employ leads perceptive readers of the entire book to reinterpret Malachi’s oracle, adding to—but not negating—his concerns with intermarriage and divorce.

On the surface, there is not much similarity between the books of Hosea and Malachi, either in style or content. Yet there are some striking similarities between Mal 2:10-16 and the language of Hosea. Foremost is the presence of the language of unfaithfulness. The verb *bāgad*, “to be unfaithful,” helps structure Malachi’s oracle. The subject of the verb is plural in the framing verses, 10 and 16 (“we,” “you”), and is singular in verses 11, 14, 15 (“Judah,” “you”). The object of the unfaithfulness is the community (“with one another”) in verse 10, and “the wife of your youth” in verses 14-15. The verb is employed without a direct object in verses 11 and 16.

Unfaithfulness in Malachi is closely linked with the language of marriage. Although this verb is used to describe the wicked in Hab 1:13 and 2:5, the only other use of this verb in the Book of the Twelve appears in Hosea. Drawing on the image of marital infidelity, in Hosea 1-3, the prophet describes the whoredom of Israel (5:3-4) and then declares that Israel has been faithless (*bāgad*) to Yahweh and has borne illegitimate children (5:7). Employing images of the transitory nature of Israel’s devotion to God (6:4), the prophet denounces their unfaithfulness (*bāgad*) to the covenant (6:7). Here, the act of treachery is violence toward fellow covenant partners, though the language of whoredom is not abandoned altogether (6:10).²³

Outside of Hosea and Malachi, there is no language of marital faithfulness or unfaithfulness in the Book of the Twelve, literal or metaphorical.

A second similarity between Mal 2:10-16 and Hosea is the link made by both books between the language of marital unfaithfulness and *b’rît*, covenant. After Malachi condemns the priests who had violated the “covenant of Levi” (2:4,5,8) he describes the two examples of marital unfaithfulness in terms of covenant. In 2:10, the unfaithfulness of the larger community is described as “defiling the covenant of our ancestors.” The nature of this communal violation is that Judah has married “the daughter of a foreign god.” The second instance is condemned in 2:14 when Yahweh decries the one who has been “unfaithful to the wife of

There is no explicit marital/covenant metaphor in the Book of the Twelve apart from Hosea and Malachi.

your covenant.” The uncertainty in this verse is whether marriage itself is understood as a covenant,²⁴ or if the “covenant wife” is a fellow member of the covenant community, that is, an Israelite woman.

The entire pericope emphasizes Israel as a community. They share one father, and unfaithfulness has occurred between “a man and his brother” (2:10). The first act of unfaithfulness described is marrying the “daughter of a foreign god.” Schuller is probably correct that Malachi substitutes this unusual phrase for the more common and expected “foreign woman” to stress the kinship ties that run through the oracle.²⁵ The second act of unfaithfulness is directed toward “the wife of your youth” and “the wife of your covenant” (2:14, 15). Through it all, God desires “godly offspring” (2:15). Judah has profaned God’s *qōdeš* (2:11), which some understand to be the community itself.²⁶

It is quite possible that the prophet intended the ambiguity of “the wife of your covenant” so that both implications can be drawn. The act of divorcing one’s wife is offensive because they have violated the covenant of marriage, but the act is all the more egregious because the injured wife is also a sister, a fellow member of the covenant community.

Whereas both Hosea and Malachi emphasize the covenant that binds Israel to Yahweh, “covenant” (*b’rît*) occurs only four other times in the Book of the Twelve. Amos 1:9 and Obadiah 7 refer to political alliances. Only Zech 9:11 (which alludes to Exod 24:8 and Sinai) and perhaps 11:10 use explicitly covenantal language to speak of Israel’s obligations to Yahweh. There is no explicit marital/covenant metaphor in the Book of the Twelve apart from Hosea and Malachi.

Malachi and Hosea also employ the verb *’āhēb*, “to love,” in a way that is unique in the Book of the Twelve. God is the subject of the verb only in Hos 3:1, 9:15, 11:1, 14:4, and Mal 1:2 (twice), and 2:11. Israel is the object of God’s love in all four Hosea texts and in Malachi 1:2. The object of God’s love in Mal 2:11 is the *qōdeš* (“holiness”) of Yahweh, another indication that the covenant community, rather than the temple, may be in view here. Elsewhere within the Book of the Twelve *’āhēb* has a relational sense only in Hos 2:5,7,10,12,13 (Ephraim’s “lovers”); 3:1 (Hosea is to go “love a woman who is loved by another”); and Zech 13:6 (of a hypothetical prophet’s “friends”). So, one reading the Book of the Twelve as a whole might be struck by the similarity between the language of God’s love for Israel in Malachi and that same language in Hosea.

There are other noteworthy—though less striking—similarities between the books of the two prophets. Malachi declares that God’s desire for his faithless people is to produce godly (rather than idolatrous) offspring (2:15). Hosea condemns Israel for acting faithlessly (*bāgaḏ*) toward Yahweh, for they had borne (masc plural) illegitimate (or “foreign”) children (Hos 5:7).²⁷ The only passages in the Book of the Twelve that are concerned with relationships (literal or metaphorical) between husbands and wives (*’iššā*) are Hos 1:2, 2:2, 3:1, 12:12, and Mal 2:14 (twice).²⁸ Hosea lacks Malachi’s verb for divorce (*šālah*) but does include language that can be interpreted as a divorce formula (“she is not my wife and I am not her husband,” Hos 2:2).²⁹

These similarities between the language of Malachi and Hosea and their position within the canon, at the beginning and end of the Book of the Twelve, suggest that these words of Malachi, originally addressed to issues of divorce and intermarriage in Persian period Judah, take on an added significance canonically. In their original context, this pericope makes good historical and theological sense. The prophet emphasizes that members of the covenant community are bound together. Offenses between two members of the community, even between a husband and wife, are not merely private affairs but involve the community as a whole. And the single individual who chooses to marry the devotee of another deity is not guilty merely of a private offense against Yahweh but against the rest of the community as well. A good, meaningful sermon can be developed from this text. So why go looking for other ways to interpret the passage?

Because Malachi is not an isolated text but part of a larger body of writings, “the canon.” The canonical reading of Mal 2:10-16, as with canonical readings of the rest of the Bible, enriches the theological scope

of the text. Beyond the particular concerns of the fifth-century community in Judah, later generations could hear in this text a wider message, a message about faithfulness to our greatest covenant partner, to God. The canonical reading here broadens the ways that we can hear and proclaim this text. And the impetus for this expanded reading is the way that other portions of the canon affect our hearing of this one text. A canonical reading asks how texts come to function in later communities by virtue of being part of a particular collection of writings. It is a literary question but much more a theological inquiry. What theological concerns come to dominate the text, any text, when it is read in relation to others?³⁰

And there is not just one canonical reading of Mal 2:10-16. Gerlinde Baumann also notes the way that Hosea and Malachi speak in terms of marriage and faithfulness. She suggests that the Book of the Twelve is not framed by two female figures (as the book of Proverbs is) but that this language serves as a framing theme for the entire Book of the Twelve. But in her reading of Mal 2:10-16, she chooses not to identify Yahweh with the spurned wife. Instead, she offers the language of Malachi as a contrast. Though the men of Judah may abandon their wives, the Lord “did not leave the ‘wife of his youth.’”³¹

I am convinced that the original message of the prophet addressed the words of Mal 2:10-16 to problems of intermarriage and abandonment of wives in post-exilic Judah, and that the canonical position of the book produces an expanded, metaphorical reading of the marital language here. But I may be wrong. It is possible that the prophet intended the original oracle to be heard metaphorically.

How, then, would a “historicizing reading” (to use O’Brien’s terminology) have come about? Canonically. Even advocates of a literal, historical reading of Mal 2:10-16 interpret the text in relation to the events described in Ezra and Nehemiah. A canon that is construed chronologically, with Malachi placed immediately before Ezra and Nehemiah, can and does affect the way Mal 2:10-16 is read.

This *Narrated Bible* approach to biblical interpretation is not all that unusual. Scholars frequently read and interpret Amos and Isaiah alongside 2 Kings. We deem such readings to be natural and understandable because history and chronology are part of the way most biblical scholars are hard-wired. But such readings are just as “canonical” as those that analyze the ways that certain parts of the literature are juxtaposed, such as Hosea and Malachi, the introduction and conclusion of the Book of the Twelve. Perhaps canonical readings are not really so novel after all.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Laments are more common in the first two-thirds of the book of Psalms. Psalms of praise predominate in the last half of the book.
- 2 The practice of one biblical writer responding to or reusing the language of a previous author is generally referred to as “intertextuality.” The metaphorical readings of Mal 2:10-16 described below assume an intertextual relationship between Mal 2:10-16 and Hosea (and/or Jeremiah).
- 3 Among the most significant: (1) Who is the “one father” (v. 10), God, Abraham, Jacob, or another? (2) Which is the “covenant of our ancestors” (v. 10)? (3) What is the *qōdeš* of the LORD (v. 11), translated by the NRSV as the “sanctuary of the LORD”? (4) Is the “daughter of a foreign god” (v. 11) a goddess, a female devotee of another god, or someone else? (5) What does *‘er w’ōneh* (v.12), translated by the NRSV as “any to witness or answer,” mean? (6) Does “the wife of your covenant” (v. 14) refer to a wife who is also part of the covenant community, or does it refer to marriage as a covenant? (7) The whole first half of verse 15 is disputed. (8) What is the referent of each of the “one”s of verse 15? (9) How is the first clause of verse 16 to be translated, usually rendered “For I hate divorce”? (10) Who is the subject of “covering,” and what is the significance of this language of violence (verse 16)?
- 4 Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, Interpretation Commentaries (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986); Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., “The Socio-Historical Setting of Malachi,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 383-390.

- 5 Paul A. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 170. Redditt suggests that Ezra 9:1-2; 10:1-15; and Nehemiah 13:23-30 indicate that priests and nonpriests alike were involved in intermarriage, so a redactor of Malachi applied the original words of Malachi to all the people.
- 6 Andrew A. Hill, *Malachi*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 231. The language of Malachi isolates the religious ramifications of these acts ("the daughter of a foreign god"), even if they were motivated by economic concerns.
- 7 Eileen M. Schuller, "The Book of Malachi," in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 865-866.
- 8 A. S. van der Woude, "Malachi's Struggle for a Pure Community: Reflections on Malachi 2:10-16, in *Tradition and Re-Interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. J. W. van Henten, et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 68.
- 9 Drinkard, 388.
- 10 Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 14-17.
- 11 Ernst Wendland, "Linear and Concentric Patterns in Malachi," *The Bible Translator* 36 (1985) 116; Hugenberger, 25.
- 12 C. C. Torrey, "The Prophecy of 'Malachi,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 17 (1898), 1-15.
- 13 Julia M. O'Brien, "Judah as Wife and Husband: Deconstructing Gender in Malachi," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 245.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 245-7.
- 15 David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 198. He points to the language of "abomination" (v. 11), a term used most frequently regarding idolatry.
- 16 Schuller, 864, notes some particular parallels between 2:10-16 and 1:6-2:9. In line with this interpretation, "covering the altar with tears" (v. 13) would refer to Israelites who perform ritual mourning, perhaps for a foreign goddess, in the temple of Yahweh.
- 17 Though Mal 3:5 includes those who oppress the poor, widows, orphans, and aliens among those who are to be judged.
- 18 Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19.1-12 and 1. Cor. 11.3-16* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup), 31-32. The Septuagint can be interpreted either as permission to divorce a wife (so Isaksson), or as a condemnation of one who hates and so divorces his wife. See C. John Collins, "The (Intelligible) Masoretic Text of Malachi 2:16," *Presbyterion* 20 (1994): 39, and Hugenberger, 51, 70-1.
- 19 Isaksson, 31.
- 20 Hugenberger, 27-36. See Prov 2:17; Ezek 16:8.
- 21 Petersen, 202-3.
- 22 Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1984), 325, offers a number of responses to the metaphorical reading of the text, particularly those of Isaksson.
- 23 Jeremiah follows Hosea's language by denouncing Judah's unfaithfulness (*bāgad* and cognates) in 3:8,10,11,20; 5:11; 9:2. The marital metaphor is prominent in all three of these chapters. R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 6, lists ten key Hebrew roots relating to marriage that occur in the three metaphorical marriage passages (Isa 50:1-3; 54:1-10; Jeremiah 2-3; Hosea 1-3). Six of those roots occur in Mal 2:10-16. But interestingly, Abma does not include Malachi in her analysis.
- 24 Hugenberger (especially pages 278-9, 342-3) has offered the most extensive and persuasive argument that marriage was understood in Israel and here in Malachi as a covenant. Prov 2:17 speaks of a woman who has "forsaken the partner of her youth" and in so doing has "forsaken the covenant of her God." This is the only occurrence of *berit* in Proverbs, so its connection to marriage might suggest that marriage itself was understood in covenantal terms. Because the covenant with Yahweh addressed marriage, however, forsaking one's partner could simply be understood in terms of violation of the larger covenant. Ezekiel describes God entering into covenant with Israel in terms of marriage (16:8), but again whether marriage itself was viewed as a covenant is not certain.
- 25 Schuller, 865.
- 26 Verhoeff, 268; van der Woude, 67-68. God "loves" (*'āhēb*) his *qōdeš* according to 2:11. *'āhēb* occurs elsewhere in Malachi only in 1:2, where three times Yahweh declares he has loved Jacob, who represents the community.
- 27 This recalls as well the "children of whoredom" whom Gomer/Israel had borne (Hos 2:4).
- 28 Malachi's phrase "the wife of your youth" does not find parallel in Hosea but in Isa 54:6 and Prov 5:18.
- 29 See the discussion in Hugenberger, 231-4.
- 30 Mary C. Callaway, "Canonical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 146-147.
- 31 Gerlinde Baumann, "Connected by Marriage, Adultery, and Violence: The Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Book of the Twelve and in the Major Prophets," *SBL Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 565-6.

